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STATE FOR AS/C, LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA ACTION
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SUBJECT: CAMEROON: VIEWS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Classified By: Classified By: Poloff Linnisa Wahid for reasons (1.4.b & d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a November 27 courtesy call by the Ambassador, President of the Cameroon National Assembly Cavaye Yeguie Djibril offered little vision for parliament and revealed suspicions regarding the benefits of free trade. As the President of the National Assembly, Djibril is first in line to succeed President Paul Biya (though temporarily) and is a significant party player in parliament but lacks much real power. End Summary.

NO REAL PLANS FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

¶2. (U) Djibril gave a general overview of the National Assembly, stating that he had no particular plans for the body because, as a &cradle of democracy,⁸ it was difficult to forecast parliament's future. He lamented that a number of recently elected Parliamentarians were ill prepared for politics, and that parliamentarians in general are handicapped by the lack of infrastructure (few desks for example) or staff. While the 1996 Constitution created two branches of Parliament, the National Assembly and the Senate, Djibril acknowledged that without the financial support of President Biya the Senate would continue to exist only on paper. He nonetheless opined that parliament is becoming more important, with MPs flexing their muscle and government officials learning that they will have to answer questions in the National Assembly.

ECONOMICS: FREE TRADE WILL HURT CAMEROON

¶4. (U) Djibril declared that free trade with European countries would hurt local industries because Cameroonian products would not be competitive in Western markets. He speculated that free trade with Europe was a conspiracy to block Chinese goods from African markets. Djibril added that African nations should stay out of the international market place. When questioned about the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), he responded that African firms cannot compete, although he did not understand why Cameroon had not used AGOA to its full potential.

COMMENT: PARTY POLITICS

¶6. (C) As the conversation became more substantive, Djibril deferred to the Secretary General of the National Assembly. The Assembly President is number two in protocol in the Biya government, and in case of a vacancy in the presidency, would serve as Acting President for up to 40 days until an election

could be held. While Djibril acts as the ruling CPDM party's majority leader in the National Assembly, he has little real power. He is where he is because of his strong loyalty to President Biya and because of the executive's desire to maintain control over the legislature. In the July legislative election, Djibril was roundly criticized by nearly everyone for offering cash bonuses to party cadres who could deliver 100 percent of the vote in their precinct to the CPDM. Djibril told Ambassador he was interested in strengthening ties to the U.S. Congress, which might help open his (and other parliamentarians,) eyes to the role a legislature could play. Post plans to follow up on our 2005 Voluntary Visitor program for parliamentarians with other outreach efforts in the months ahead.

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